

# GSA sinks in flood of silver dollar orders

By Roger Boye

THE COLOSSAL response to Uncle Sam's sale of Carson City silver dollars has shocked many experts, including most government bureaucrats.

"It was beyond belief," said Steve Guiheen of the General Services Administration (GSA), the government agency that conducted the sale of more than 900,000 old coins. "We had sensed there would be a lot of enthusiasm (for the sale), but what happened was astounding."

The GSA had planned to accept orders for two months starting Feb. 8. But after receiving more than 350,000 letters in just 12 sale days, GSA chiefs declared a sellout on Feb. 19.

And collectors whose orders got in "on time" may not procure all the coins they requested. The GSA has decided to "spread the treasures around" and will mail no more than 10 1883-CC dollars, 20 1884-CC dollars, and 5 "mixed-year" dollars to any one buyer, regardless of the number ordered.

The mail deluge was greatest on Feb. 11 when the GSA received 100,000 orders, and the number of phone calls to a special toll-free number peaked at a half-million on the first sale day.

"The phone company called us on Feb. 8 and said, 'You just surpassed

the number of long-distance phone calls made on a typical Mother's Day.' Then they called a little while later and said, 'Now you just beat out Christmas,'" Guiheen said.

Collectors dialed the toll-free number to learn the prices of the coins (which ranged from \$45 to \$65), but many persons heard only a busy signal on the first three sale days. By Feb. 11, most callers got through.

Meanwhile, government workers are trying to process at least 7,000 letters a day, and they will begin mailing coins to collectors on March 24, Guiheen said. Nevertheless, thousands of hobbyists will have to wait many weeks for the merchandise because of the windfall of orders.

"We have a legal commitment to ship all coins by Aug. 31," Guiheen added. "Hopefully, it won't take that long." Collectors whose orders are only partially filled (because of the new order limit) will receive refund checks that may not arrive until after the coins.

Later this year, the GSA will conduct its last — and less spectacular — sale of nearly 55,000 Carson City dollars dated 1880, 1881, and 1885. Those rarer-date coins will be sold in a national mail auction.

The GSA has promised that it will not release the names or addresses of buyers.